

Christian Accommodated Mindfulness – Week 1 Breathing Exercise

I'd like you to make yourself comfortable, sitting in a relaxed posture, closing your eyes or finding a spot in the room to let your eyes focus on. Allow yourself to switch from the usual active or doing mode to a mode of simply being, of resting in God's caring presence. As you allow your body to become still, bring your attention to the fact that you are breathing. The breath is a reminder of God creating us, "And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life;"... "and man became a living soul." [Gen. 2:7]. With every breath in, you can recognize God breathing His life into you. With every breath out you can place yourself in His hands, resting in the Lord...Breathe in His life, breathe out resting in Him. There is no need to change anything...Just breathe naturally...He is with you in your experience, giving you love and grace...

And now focus on your breath more intently. If your mind wanders into other things, this is normal. No need to criticize yourself. Simply release those thoughts into God's loving hands and return to your breath. There is no need for a long prayer, a simple yielding and turning of your focus back to the breath is releasing these things to God.

Become aware of the movement of your breath as it goes into your body and as it leaves your body. Notice how it feels to you. No need to manipulate the breath in any way or change it. Simply be aware of it and of any feelings associated with breathing. Notice how the air feels going into your nostrils...Perhaps you can feel the air flow inside your nostrils into your sinuses, and down into your lungs as you breathe in...Notice how the breath feels deep down in your belly...Observe the abdomen as it expands when you breathe in, and as it falls when you breathe out...Expanding and falling...Expanding and falling. Observe how the air feels going out...Be completely here in each moment with each breath...No need to try to do anything, no need to get any place, simply be with your breath.

Ride the waves of your breath, observing the rhythmic pattern...If your mind wanders, gently release those thoughts into God's hands and bring it back to the moment-to-moment sense of the flow of your breathing...Your breath is an anchor to focus your attention, to bring you back to the present moment whenever you notice that your mind is becoming absorbed or reactive to something....Just be with your breath.

In a moment, the breathing meditation will end. Whatever way you would like to end this time will be fine. And when you are ready, bring your awareness back to the room, opening your eyes.

Adapted from:

Kabat-Zinn, J. (2002). *Mindfulness meditation, CD series 1*. <<http://www.mindfulnesscds.com/collections/cds/products/series-1>>

Christian Accommodated Mindfulness – Week 2 Body Scan Exercise

Make yourself comfortable in your chair, closing your eyes or finding a spot in the room to let your eyes focus on. Allow yourself to switch from the usual mode of doing to a mode of simply being, of resting in God's caring presence. He is here with you, loving you and accepting you as you are. You will be focusing on a variety of your experiences in the present moment as you sit here. As you do this exercise, your mind will naturally wander. That's normal. It's just what minds do. When you find yourself wandering, just gently release these things into God's hands and bring your mind back to this exercise. There is no need for a long verbal prayer. A simple yielding or letting go from your heart and turning your focus back to the exercise will do.

So make yourself comfortable in your chair, and as you are sitting there, begin by focusing on the sounds going on in the room today. You hear my voice, what else do you hear?...Perhaps you hear your breath...What else?...Notice how the sounds come and go. If your mind starts analyzing the sounds somehow, just notice that and gently bring yourself back to simply experiencing the sounds as they are, as they enter your awareness and leave...

Now, gently bring your awareness to your breathing. See if you can be aware of where the sensations of breathing are most prominent. This may be at the nostrils, the mouth, the throat, in the rising and falling of the chest, or at the abdomen as the belly rises and deflates. Allow the breath to do what it naturally does without manipulating it or changing it. Be with the physical sensations of the breath just as they are, not with the breath as you would like to be, but with the breath as it is in this moment. Allow your body to let go with each breath out, as the chair or floor takes on the work of holding you up, and let yourself be just where you are, right here, right now, in this moment. And in the midst of all this—the sounds...your breath, God is here, loving you and accepting you just as you are. He is with you, giving you grace.

Now notice your bodily sensations. There's no need to change anything, just notice the different sensations and be with them. Examine the general state of the body. Perhaps there is a feeling of calm or tension, restlessness or maybe even agitation. Your task is simply to notice, to register it in your consciousness, in your awareness, the body as a whole, as best you can in this moment.

Now gently shift your awareness to the back, top and sides of your head. See if you can detect any physical sensation that presents itself. Try not to interfere with that sensation—as you attend to the head. Keep in mind that a sensation may involve warmth, coolness, tingling, moisture....if you experience no sensation or numbness see if you can be fully present and experience that, as you explore the back, sides and top of the head.

On the next breath out, let your awareness move to the face; from forehead to chin and from ear to ear. Allow your awareness to float freely around the face, experiencing any sensation that arises and bringing your attention to that area as best you can. Become aware of the chin, the lips, inside the mouth, your tongue, the cheeks, the eyes, the eyebrows, the ears, the forehead—letting whatever sensations arise and simply noticing them come and go. Let your attention linger, becoming aware of sensations as they change.

And now, on the next breath out, gently move your awareness to the neck and throat, softening and releasing as best you can, allowing your attention to hover in this region of the body – noticing any

sensations that well up – give them your full and undivided attention as you become aware of the neck and throat.

From time to time your attention will be pulled away by thoughts arising in your mind – perhaps into the past, the future or fantasy – into worry or judgment or critical thoughts or your attention may also be hijacked by other sensations elsewhere in the body- if this happens – you can simply yield it to God, placing it in His caring hands. Just gently escort your attention back to the body – in this moment, which at present, involves returning your focus to the neck and throat.

Now, on the next breath out, guide your attention into the shoulders, allowing your awareness to focus on any sensations large or small arising. If there are more intense sensations, see if you can attend to them in the same way, exploring or opening up to them rather than resisting or fighting them as you attend to the front, sides and back of the shoulders. Move deeply into the shoulder joints - working at opening up to them rather than resisting, bracing or fighting.

Now surveying the arms– you can explore both arms at the same time or each one individually. Exploring the fronts, sides and backs of the arms elbows and wrists – moving deeply into each of the joints. Sensations might enter your field of awareness due to your clothes as they touch your skin or make contact with your arms upon the surface you are resting on. There may also be more subtle sensations below the level of the skin. Your task is to observe these sensations with curiosity and openness, noticing as much detail as possible.

Now, on the next breath out, let your awareness move down and freely float throughout your hands. Attend to any sensation that crops up – exploring each hand individually or together. There may be tingling, pressure, numbness or warmth. Observe as best you can the quality of the sensations that arise in the hands. And again if your awareness is pulled away by thoughts or another sensation of the body, release whatever you are experiencing into God’s hands, gently letting these be in the background and returning to the hands.

Now, on the next breath out move your attention to the upper back and survey this area. There may be sensations of pressure or temperature. Your task is to simply observe each sensation without having to change anything. Give yourself permission to explore and feel each sensation as you explore the upper back.

Direct your attention now to the lower back. Draw your attention to any sensation that comes up and explore it in detail. The lower back is a region that presents, for many of us, challenging sensations. See if you can open up to these, lean into them, allowing whatever sensations arise to follow their own course.

Now, become aware of the chest as it rises and falls. There may be sensations made by the clothing against your skin as the chest rises and falls with each breath. You may become aware of the sensation of your beating heart. Let your awareness fully penetrate into each sensation as it arises, allowing it to do whatever it does as you observe moment to moment.

Observe your hips pressing against the chair... Notice how your thighs feel in your clothes...your calves...If your mind wanders, just gently release those thoughts to God and bring it back to focusing on your calves...

Of course, when the mind is taken away into thought or elsewhere in the body, come back to the object of meditation in a kind way, a compassionate way, a way that acknowledges that getting lost in thought is just the nature of mind. In fact, noticing that the mind has wandered is just as much a part of this meditation as is staying on the body part itself which in this moment is the legs.

And now, releasing the legs and allowing this special kind of attention to move into your feet, Observe how your feet feel inside your shoes on the floor...the tops of the feet, the toes, the nails, the soles, the heels

Once again, become aware of the physical sensation of the breath as it enters and leaves the body. As you open up to things just as they are in each moment, see how this openness is healing and nourishing. Allow the world to be as it is, beyond fears, worries, tensions, and beyond the tendencies of the mind to want things to be a certain way, release all these tendencies into God's hands. Be awake to your experience as it unfolds in this moment and in this moment, remember that this state of clarity is available to you at any time by simply bringing your attention or your awareness to the breath.

Now become aware of any feelings you are experiencing in this moment. Just observe them, whatever they are... And in the midst of all this—the body sensations...the breath...the feelings, God is here, loving you and accepting you just as you are. You can yield, if you like, all your experience, whatever it is, into His caring hands. He is with you, giving you grace.

Perhaps a prayer of releasing this entire experience into His hands will emerge in your heart. If so, quietly say that prayer now, if you like...and when you're ready, open your eyes.

Adapted from:

Centre for Mindfulness Studies. (2014). *Session 1: Body scan script*. Retrieved from <<http://www.mindfulnessstudies.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/18.-Session-1-Body-Scan-Script.pdf>>

Garzon, F. (2015b, September). *Adapting mindfulness and other meditation forms to conservative Christian clients*. Presented at the meeting of the American Association of Christian Counselors, Nashville, TN

Christian Accommodated Mindfulness – Week 3 Accepted Tenderness Meditation

The wisdom of accepted tenderness by Richard Johnston

This Prayer Meditation is focused on the tenderness and love of God.

By praying and meditating on these themes, the goal is to internalize these biblical truths as an experiential reality in our hearts.

First, seek to be still in God's presence.

Sitting in a straight-backed chair make yourself comfortable and relaxed. Your posture should be upright so that you can remain alert during this time.

You can close your eyes if you wish, allowing my voice to guide you through the prayer

Now gently come to focus on your breathing remembering that the Holy Spirit himself is described as the breath of God.

As you breathe in physically seek to breathe in the very presence of God who is with you right here and right now.

Spend a few moments simply breathing in the presence of God.

The Scriptures describe the Holy Spirit as the breath of God. Welcome now the presence of the Holy Spirit who is the breath of God in you and around you.

TODAY O LORD I ACCEPT YOUR ACCEPTANCE OF ME

Notice any questions or commentary that arise in your mind at this time

As you become aware of any thoughts arising in the mind gently seek to let these come and go, returning your focus to God and the words of the Prayer

TODAY O LORD I ACCEPT YOUR ACCEPTANCE OF ME

YOU ARE ALWAYS WITH ME AND ALWAYS FOR ME

As much as you are able, use these words to express your own faith to God, but if you sense any resistance in your heart don't criticize yourself in any way. Simply acknowledge with kindness your honest response.

As much as you are able – seek to identify with and pray these words from your own heart

YOU ARE ALWAYS WITH ME AND ALWAYS FOR ME

I RECEIVE INTO MY SPIRIT YOUR GRACE, YOUR MERCY, YOUR CARE

God is the most gracious, kind, merciful and caring being who exists

And he cares for you personally

In these moments, seek to accept and receive his grace and mercy at the core of who you are.

Spend a few moments in the silence seeking to be aware of these realities.

if your mind wanders, gently bring your awareness back to the silence, and back to the presence of God, here with you now

I RECEIVE INTO MY SPIRIT YOUR GRACE, YOUR MERCY, YOUR CARE

I REST IN YOUR LOVE O LORD

Knowing that God loves you and accepts you for who you are right now you are free to rest in his love. Notice if any struggling, or arguments or questions arise in your mind
Gently watch these thoughts come and go
And return your focus to the love and tenderness of God towards you personally

I REST IN YOUR LOVE O LORD

In these moments continue to rest in the accepted tenderness of God towards you personally
Using the stretches of silence to simply enjoy being with him
In a few moments I will say amen to signal the end of this Prayer meditation

Breathing in your presence,
I REST IN YOUR LOVE O LORD
AMEN

Adapted from:

Johnston, R. (2015). Christian mindfulness six-session online course: Exploring mindfulness from a Christian perspective. Retrieved from <<http://www.christianmindfulness.co.uk/onlinecourse.html>>